
CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor
Zeke Cohen – Council President



Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead - Director
100 Holliday Street, Room 415
Baltimore, MD 21202

CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

The Honorable Ryan Dorsey
CHAIR

HEARING NOTES

*LO25-0038
Charter Review*

Hearing Date: 1/21/2026

Hearing Start Time: 4:00 PM

Hearing End Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

Total Estimated Attendance: 15

Committee Members in Attendance:

- Chair Ryan Dorsey
- Zac Blanchard
- Odette Ramos
- Jermaine Jones

MAJOR SPEAKERS

(This is NOT an attendance record.)

- Isaiah Griffith – Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
- Ben Guthorn –Department of Legislative Reference
- Jeff Hochstetler – City Law Department

NOTES

- Chair Dorsey welcomed the committee and Council President Cohen
 - In previous meetings we have discussed a host of topics in varying degrees of detail
 - Discussed members’ take from a high level
 - 2026 vs. 2028, is something ready for prime time, is there a political path, etc.
 - Tonight we will recap with particular attention to how topics interact
- Council President
 - Acknowledges the passing of Councilman Ed Reisinger
 - Appreciates the work that has already gone into the endeavor
 - Important to all of us that we are building the best possible structure for our government
 - Past charter commissions have floated great ideas but this committee is moving forward with action and purpose
 - Thoughtful and deliberative
 - Community engagement is also incredibly important – it is the people’s document

- We need to do an earnest, honest listening and engagement with folks in the community
 - Shared a one pager to promote community input sessions (see bill file)
 - Please distribute the one pager in community events to drive turnout
 - Also message that individuals can send testimony and ideas to testimony@baltimorecity.gov
 - Also requests that, by February, members come up with 10 leaders in their districts to invite and that members attend at least one listening session
- At very beginning of the term there was a conversation between CP, Mayor, and Comptroller to engage National League of Cities on the Board of Estimates
 - That group is working to provide options for reforming the Board
 - Expects presentation within the next 4 to 6 weeks and requested that the presentation be given to this committee as well
 - Thoughts on composition of the BOE and longer conversation about reshaping city government in more fundamental ways
 - Do we even need a Board of Estimates
 - Could contracts that reach a certain threshold come before the council like most other major cities?
 - The reality is that most cities do not have a board of estimates
 - Widespread agreement even among the members that the current system is antiquated and should be reformed and/or abolished
- Chair Dorsey
 - Much of what we have discussed to date is intertwined with the BOE and its duties and is an albatross in the charter
- Vice Chair Bullock
 - We previously discussed potential impacts on the bond rating
 - Any major change to the form of government will result in bond rating being examined, but that does NOT mean that the bond rating will be lowered
- Chair Dorsey
 - We need to begin to look at what changes to the Charter really look like
 - Committee members have been provided with printed copies of the Charter
 - As well as Vic Tervala report and a document circulated by Councilwoman Ramos on the capital budget
 - Recent submission on governance and administration of the Children and Youth Fund (available in bill file)
 - We have had various discussions on the need (or lack thereof) to have funds in the charter
 - Discussed some progress with Vice Chair after the last meeting
 - Also circulated notes from the finance director on purpose and makeup of the Board of Finance
 - The Charter is filled with administrative materials that need not be in the Charter
 - That is, material that is inappropriate
 - Requested assistance of law department to assist with creating a transition provision to mitigate people's anxieties about the removal of that administrative material
- Law Department
 - Effective dates and transition information is possible

- To members – is this a reasonable approach
 - CM Ramos – the public wants to know what we are doing and removing information may concern them, doing legislation first may allow for a discussion that allows us to explain to the public
 - Chair – within that general outlook, there are cases where it may matter more and less
 - CM Ramos – for example, if we removed the agencies, some operations may be of interest and others would not, board of estimates and the budget process would be of immense interest
 - CM Blanchard – most of what we are referring to with conditional implementations would be in the situations that Charter material is moved to code
 - It is good to involve the public through a preliminary legislative process
 - The legislation should closely resemble that which is in the Charter
 - Chair
 - Highlighted several provisions that are far too prescriptive for the Charter
- The Chair highlighted a number of duplicative provisions within the Board of Estimates article
 - When generally looking at things related to the budget and funds in general, we should take away the things that don't need to be there and move the budget process to an article that is entirely dedicated to it
 - Vice Chair – seems cleaner than having it scattered throughout various places
- Chair Dorsey
 - With that, as it relates to special funds, tweaking other areas of the charter should allow for those funds to be created by ordinance
 - Moving budget language from BOE article to the Budget article can also involve some tweaking to
- On the question of combining Department of Legislative Reference and Office of Council Services
 - Director of Council Services – without making other changes, the merger would not expand OCS/DLR capacity
 - Legislative Reference – proposed change is insufficient to the outcome the council is seeking
 - CM Ramos – asks that responses are shared with members prior to meetings to be prepared
 - Recognizes they need to money and resources, as well as a relationship with the executive
 - Chair – please express a preferred outcome in writing (both CM Ramos, OCS, and DLR)
- Vice Chair Bullock introduces a member of the public – will speak at the end
- Chair – veto reform
 - There is some specific to the budget, need to address the timeline broadly and with respect to the fiscal year
- Mayor's Office of Government Relations
 - When will these amendments actually be prepared
- Chair
 - We have gone through all of the topics in varying degrees
 - Today, we are recapping to determine where we are in the outcomes
 - With many, they are very narrow
 - For example, on veto, the period of time a mayor has to veto
- MOGR
 - Would like an outline of those amendments for 2026 and 2028 on what is moving forward

- Chair – yes, that is in everyone's interest to summarize takeaways
- Chair – budget timing
- MOGR – what is the rationale around veto reform overall
 - Council GC – previously was an issue with redistricting last session
- Chair – the need to gauge the timing of your actions is a convention driven by the Charter's special attention to a veto only made possible by the inclusion of “regular” meetings
- Vice Chair – goal is a clear process that allows for some regularity
 - Currently the council is required to contort itself
- CM Ramos – on timing of the budget
 - Only reason we get the budget so late is because the preliminary budget must get submitted to and approved by the BOE
 - Both the timing and mechanism
- Review on audit timing
- Franchise Article – minor privileges consensus should be removed but the style of the article is odd and outdated
- Procurement – comes out
- Biennial audits – just repeal and move to code
- Close out supplemental reform – who is giving the okay for money to be spent on a day to day basis
 - If we condition funds, we determine when a condition has been met
 - At state level, the treasurer, a representative of the legislature, makes that determination
 - This comes from the year after year outcome of agencies spending more than what is authorized by the budget
 - Who is holding the purse strings
 - Currently finance department within the executive branch
 - CM Ramos – moving timing of the budget to earlier, we may have to do supplementals if information comes from the general assembly that we are not aware of
 - Consider supplementals relative to the timing of the budget
 - Would rather have supplementals that shadow transfers between agencies that the public has not vision into
 - We could refuse to pass supplementals
- Term limits
 - Chair – not for 2026
 - CM Ramos – do it for 2026
 - CM Blanchard – what does the change look like
 - CM Ramos – 3 options
 - Deletion/repeal
 - Alternative proposal
 - For example, different version – 3 terms, staggered
 - CM Blanchard – more in line with the second option but does agree with doing this now
 - Vice Chair – public should be engaged in this process
 - Chair – on this topic more than any other the public should be involved
 - Many people gravitate towards as a catch all solution for their dissatisfaction with city government

- Widespread support but that previous passage happened without any public discourse on why they may be bad public policy
 - Did not distinguish between legislators, executives, or a comptroller
 - That sounds be given a deep level of consideration in public
 - We should educate and have earnest conversations
- CM Jones – agree that people did vote in support but much came without truly knowing the consequences and having the conversation, we should have that conversation
 - Has encountered residents who did not necessarily see all of the consequences
 - It is our responsibility to evaluate those consequences
- CM Ramos – this was not brought to the voters in good intentions
- Vice Chair – not urgent that we pass something for 2026 but we DO need to be having the conversation now
 - This should not appear to be self-dealing
- CM Blanchard – 2024 election did involve a similar funded initiative that was responded to by elected officials
 - We can do public dialogue
- Chair – if we didn't take up any other measures, we would have the capacity but term limits will suck up so much oxygen that it could make difficult the other efforts
- Capital Budget – CM Ramos
 - shared documents with committee outlining capital budget process
 - majority of jurisdictions have board principles in the charter but process outlined in the charter
 - of those examined, only Baltimore County and City have capital and operating budgets in the same ordinance
 - several jurisdictions have spending affordability boards
 - in Montgomery county that includes council members
 - several cities do not have a planning board
 - every jurisdiction has hearings on the capital budget except for us
- CM Blanchard – would be interested in the Mayor's perspective on a proposed set of reforms
- Minister Eric Brockman
 - Wants to talk about voter intent
 - In 2016 voters established the Children and Youth Fund
 - Was it the voter's intent to establish a fund with very little oversight
 - A recent bill is inadequate
 - Concerned about news and OIG reports showing where money is being spent
 - Lack of oversight
 - Would like to move the fund back under city control
 - Have the fund administered in-house as opposed to outsourcing

Hearing Packet in bill file? ----- YES NO N/A

Attendance Sheet in bill file? ----- YES NO N/A

Agency reports read? ----- YES NO N/A

Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded? ----- YES NO N/A

Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file? ----- YES NO N/A

Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file? ----- YES NO N/A

Notes by: Ethan Navarre
Notes Date: 1/21/2026

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